Synopsis

Universally acclaimed as one of the most celebrated American playwrights of the twentieth century, Tennessee Williams (1911—1983) created what his fellow dramaturge David Mamet calls "the greatest dramatic poetry in the American language" and animated the American theatre with his original theatrical imagination. At the core of his drama is his profound concern about humanity—especially about "individuals trapped by circumstances". Williams instilled elements of psychological perspicacity and expressivity into his theatre, and called for more understanding and sympathy for the ostracized people struggling in their broken world.

A Streetcar Named Desire, Williams's all-time masterpiece, is threaded by this concern about humanity. The play centers on the tragic experience of Blanche, and the present thesis intends to pinpoint Williams's insight into human psyche through a multi-perspective study of this character, together with a survey of Williams's vast repertoire of theatrical techniques.

The thesis is composed of two parts, plus the "Introduction" and the "Conclusion".

The "Introduction" briefly traces Williams's achievements as a prominent American playwright as well as the status of *Streetcar*, and introduces the thematic messages in his plays. He had as his major theme "the destructive impact of society on the sensitive non-conformist individual".

The first part "Thematic Duets" has five chapters.

In the first three chapters I will talk about the many-faceted Blanche through a scrutiny of her interaction with the other three major figures during her stay in New Orleans, namely: Stanley, Blanche's antagonist, Stella, Blanche's sister, and Mitch, Blanche's beau. Chapter One "Blanche and Stanley: Two Polar Opposites" traces the development of the inevitable and forceful antagonism between these two major characters in *Streetcar*, and discusses on a greater level the conflicts it epitomes, to wit: Fantasy Vs. Reality, Old South Vs. New South, and Civilized Vs. Primitive. The antagonism culminates in Stanley's rape and total destruction of Blanche.

Chapter Two "Blanche and Stella: Two Southern Gentlewomen" handles the sisterly bond between the two women, and the discrepancy in their attitudes towards life and its bedrock: desire. One's is overt hypocrisy and covert debauchery; the other's is healthy and straightforward.

Chapter Three "Blanche and Mitch: Two Lonely Souls" deals with the short-lived romance between the two characters. Mitch gives Blanche hope of salvation and then kills it in her face. Though of vastly different upbringing, they

share something that transcends class and upbringing: loneliness. What ruins the romance is Blanche's insincerity and mendacity in dealing with Mitch and her past. She is a role-player in her own drama.

These three chapters are an attempt to define the many aspects of Blanche through her contact with the three persons that are to change her life. Chapter Four "Ambiguity in Streetcar" discusses the complexity and ambiguity of Williams's attitude toward a character that is equally complex and ambiguous. And Chapter Five "Blanche and Williams: Two Fugitive Aliens" goes back to the psychological core of that complexity and ambiguity. This chapter points out that as sensitive non-conformist individuals, Williams and Blanche share much the same psychic experience and the only way out for them is the achievement of compassion and understanding between vastly different human beings.

Williams ranked among the foremost experimenters on the 20th-century American stage. The dramatic expressivity of the play is crucial to the exposition of his thematic concern. Part II "The Dramaturgical World", consisting of four chapters, is a probe into Williams's theatre.

Chapter One "Death, Desire, Dementia—Blanche's Journey of Symbolism" tackles the interaction among the main symbols in the play—death, desire and dementia that effectively underpin Blanche's life journey.

Chapter Two "Theatrical Imagery" categorizes the multifarious and recurring images that pervade the play.

Chapter Three "Metaphors of Movement" contrasts metaphors of movement with static symbols. This refers to the often repetitive actions of the characters which reveal their inner worlds and reinforce the thematic messages of the play.

Chapter Four "Theatrical Effects" is a survey of the resplendent dramatic techniques applied in *Streetcar*.

The thesis ends with "Conclusion: The Broken World", which spotlights Blanche as a spokesperson for Williams and pinpoints his ultimate concern for humanity—his and his outcasts' search for wholeness through love—behind the creation of this at once unique and universal figure.

On December 3, 1947, some five hundred people at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre in New York were spellbound by the premiere of *Streetcar*. Fifty-three years later in 2000 in Xiamen, China, a Chinese student was deeply moved by a small, unassuming book before him—the text version of the 1947 *Streetcar*. That an American play half a century ago can take a Chinese student's breath away well vindicates its beauty and power, which defy the passage of time and the boundary of countries. I have had the pleasure to be overwhelmed by this great play of Williams's,

and I hope through this thesis more people will come to know about *Streetcar*, which, I am sure, never fails to strike a responsive chord in our hearts.

Keywords: *Streetcar*　Blanche Williams　Duets Dramaturgy　Broken World

Contents

Introduction

Tennessee (Thomas Lanier) Williams (1911-1983) is one of the greatest American dramatists. He won two Rockfeller Prizes, the Gold Medal for Drama from

the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the National Institute of Arts and Letters, the Medal of Honor for Literature from the National Arts Club, and two honorary doctorates. Williams was honored by President Carter at Kennedy Center in 1979.

The play under discussion here, *A Streetcar Named Desire* (hereinafter, *Streetcar*), premiered at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre in New York on December 3, 1947. It is a masterpiece of theatre, "what many regard as Williams's greatest achievement" (Roudnané, 4).[1] It ran for an unprecedented 855 performances, and was the first play ever to win all three major awards, the Pulitzer Prize, the New York Drama Critic's Circle Award, and the Donaldson Award. The 1996 thirty-two-cent United States postage stamp, issued in commemoration of Tennessee Williams, features a portrait of Williams in a white linen suit against a twilight sky and, in the background, a streetcar. The choice of the streetcar as the only element in the design that can be specifically tied to one of Williams's plays, testifies to the centrality of *Streetcar* in his dramatic canon as well as in the American cultural consciousness (Londré, 45).

During his thirty-year career as a dramatist, Williams wrote twenty-five full-length plays, including *The Glass Menagerie*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, *Orpheus Descending*, and *Night of the Iguana*. From beginning to end of his long and illustrious career, Tennessee Williams wrote about the extreme situations of human life, especially of "solitary misfits"(Tischler, 529), entangled by the issues of alienation, loneliness in search of purpose, thwarted desire, insanity, depression, alcoholism, abuse, violence, torn families and homophobia. As Williams once wrote:

> Every artist has a basic premise pervading his whole life, and that premise can provide the impulse to everything he creates. For me the dominating premise has been the need for understanding and tenderness and fortitude among individuals trapped by circumstances. (Williams, "Person-to-Person" 70)

On another occasion he said: "I have only one major theme for my work which is the destructive impact of society on the sensitive non-conformist individual." (Letter, 1939, to Audrey Wood). It is interesting to note that in Williams's plays the "non-conformist" "individuals trapped by circumstances" are often women. We must mention that Williams was a homosexual. As such he was not only able to sympathize with women but also strongly identify with them. "It's true my heroines often speak for me. …I think that more often I have used a woman rather than a man to articulate

[1] The MLA in-text quotation and bibliography are utilized in this thesis.

my feelings," Williams admitted ("Confessional", 155). Women outcasts in his works are metaphors or according to Stephen S. Stanton, "female impersonators"(3) for their creator. In one sense they are a literary device, a camouflage; in another, a confession (3). His sympathy with women, his understanding of their situation, or even his homosexuality can be traced to the fact that he spent the most sensitive age of his isolated childhood in the accompany of women. As a matter of fact, Williams's "dominating premise" and "one major theme" find their correlatives in his own life. In his long-time friend Elia Kazan's words, "Everything in his life is in his plays, and everything in his plays is in his life." (330) Williams mined his own life for much of the pathos in his drama. Living as a homosexual in an era and culture unfriendly to homosexuality, Williams suffered in much the same way as his outcast characters. Marginalized, they all lived in what is to them a broken world.

In the preface to *Streetcar*, Williams quotes the fifth stanza of Hart Crane's 1932 poem "The Broken Tower" as the epigraph of the play:

> And so it was I entered the broken world
> To trace the visionary company of love, its voice
> An instant in the wind (I know not whither hurled)
> But not for long to hold each desperate choice

Williams and his outcast characters are in a sense the broken people in the broken world.

Darryl Erwin Haley correctly asserts that Williams's plays touch us so firmly, move us so profoundly, because they contain the sad experiences of a real person—Thomas Lanier Williams (44). Yet what made Williams a great playwright is that he did not merely theatricalize his life or make his plays dramatic self-exposés: in drawing on his private experience, he universalized it—through the portraits of nonconformists Williams touched the tender center on the human psyche.

In *Streetcar* the woman Williams identified himself with is Blanche, one of Williams's most memorable characters (Liechtenstein, 22), and a vehicle for Williams's arguments (Haley, 12) by being, as Stanton puts it, a psychological extension of her creator (23). Blanche, a prim prostitute, is Williams's prototypical heroine trapped by the harsh pragmatics of the modern world—a broken one to her—represented by Stanley, her antagonist. In light of her sordid but tragic history, she is the one that the playwright—and maybe also the audience—feels both the need to condemn and the desire to pardon. Blanche's complexity and her inner disharmony,

together with her conflicts with people such as Stanley who don't understand her, gives the play a particular tension that is lasting and thought provoking.

The first part of this thesis "The Thematic Duets", is therefore an exploration of Blanche's labyrinthine psyche: how she is "trapped by circumstances", how she suffers from "the destructive impact of society" and her "existential affinity"(Debusscher, 183) with her creator Williams.

The first three chapters of Part One present a scrutiny of the multifarious aspects of Blanche. Chapter One "Blanche and Stanley: Two Polar Opposites" discusses the incompatibility and antagonism of these two major characters, and reveals on a deeper stratum three dichotomies that are embodied by the two polar opposites: Fantasy Vs. Reality, Old South Vs. New South, and Civilized Vs. Primitive. Chapter Two "Blanche and Stella: Two Southern Gentlewomen" starts with a comparison between the sisters and then discusses in length Blanche's aspect of desire. Chapter Three "Blanche and Mitch: Two Lonely Souls" deals with Blanche's short-lived romance with Mitch, and analyzes the stratifications of Blanche's identity. Chapter Four "Ambiguity in Streetcar" examines the complexity and ambiguity that pervade *Streetcar*, not only of the characterizations, but also of Williams himself. Chapter Five "Blanche and Williams: Two Fugitive Aliens" explores the psychic affinity between Blanche and her creator, revealing that Williams is as much a broken figure as his heroine.

Tennessee Williams is an outstanding dramatist not merely because with perspicacious eyes he examined the fragile human psyche, but also because with eye-catching props he theatricalized his insights. He was the disciple of the earlier avant-garde playwrights, particularly the surrealists and expressionists (Stanton, 6). He daringly departed from the conventional stage modes to create "plastic theatre" (a synthesis of the theatre arts), which he believed "must take the place of the exhausted theatre of realistic conventions."(Williams, qtd. in Debusscher 180) He combined surrealism, expressionism, psychological realism (memory play structure), symbolism, using sundry audio-visual effects, to revolutionize the American stage. *Streetcar* is a fitting specimen of his virtuosity in dramatic control, in which he achieved great thematic expressivity. As dramaturgy is indispensable to the study of drama, this thesis will probe into the dramaturgical world of *Streetcar*, with an eye on the broken world that Blanche dwells in, while at the same time offering my appreciation of the beauty of dramatic art as exemplified in this great play.

Part Two “The Dramaturgical World” consists of four chapters. Chapter One “Death, Desire, Dementia—Blanche’s Journey of Symbolism” points out that Blanche’s life is defined by the three main symbols and analyzes their operation. Chapter Two “Theatrical Imagery” and Chapter Three “Metaphors of Movement” sort through the many images and metaphors in the drama and classify them into several groups. Chapter Four “Theatrical Effects” is an assortment of the varying dramatic techniques applied in the play.

The conclusion of the thesis, “The Broken World”, re-accentuates Williams’s message behind the creation of the prototypical Blanche, a message of understanding and compassion for people trapped in their broken world.

I first heard of *A Streetcar Named Desire* as a film some ten years ago. I knew of it because Marlone Brando, one of my favorite movie stars, played Stanley, whom he had portrayed already on stage in 1947. (Actually several of Williams’s plays had their film versions, such as *The Glass Menagerie*, *The Rose Tattoo*, and *Camino Real*.) Yet when I decided to write about *Streetcar* last year, I found to my disappointment that in China there was less than adequate critical study either about the play or about Williams. Maybe it was because Williams’s work is considered “popular”, or because he was a homosexual. Therefore Williams and his plays are deemed unsuitable as a critical subject for academicians. Regardless of the reasons for the relative neglect of Williams and his work, I want to point out that his plays—especially *Streetcar*—are pregnant with possibilities for scholarly research. The universal human truths spoken by Williams should be heard today by more people. The present thesis is an attempt to serve this end.

Part I Thematic Duets

The reason this part is thus named is two-fold. For one thing, many a scene in *Streetcar* has only two characters on the stage, such as Scene One (mainly with Blanche and Stella), Scene Four (Blanche and Stella), Scene Six (Blanche and Mitch), Scene Nine (Blanche and Mitch), and Scene Ten (Blanche and Stanley). But more importantly, the play centers on Blanche's short stay in her sister's house, which is defined by her interaction with the three persons, Stanley, Stella and Mitch that have altered her life track. It must be pointed out that the multifarious facets of Blanche "the broken figure" are exposed through her respective association with these persons. As is suggested in the layout of this part, the first three chapters serve to unravel the complexity of this fine-cut character. And after having peeled off the many layers on her, what we see is an immensely disturbed and distressed soul, lonely and helpless in her broken world.

Blanche is a solitary wanderer "entering alien territory" (Bigsby, 30), where she finds her past impinging on the present. It is also a place of hostility where, as a sensitive non-conformist, she stands to be punished by Stanley, the representative of the conventional morality. Yet there is no moral absolute in *Streetcar*. Ambiguity defines Blanche, Stanley, even Stella and Mitch, which makes these characters real and three-dimensional. Moreover, ambiguity in the play also has fine expression in its creator Tennessee Williams. Chapters Four and Five enter into the ambiguity in *Streetcar*, and probe the Williams-Blanche psychic affinity: Williams is as much a solitary and sensitive wanderer as Blanche. In a sense he makes Blanche his spokesperson and calls for understanding and compassion between different people. In Blanche, too, he has successfully elevated personal situation—either of his or hers—to existential paradigm. In other words, in examining Blanche's psyche Williams also scrutinizes the fragility of human nature. This, coupled with the compelling conflicts and vivid characterization, creates a lasting impact on the audience.

Chapter One Blanche and Stanley: Two Polar Opposites

"He acts like an animal, has an animal's habits!… Something-ape-like about him!… Thousands and thousands of years have passed him right by: and here he is—Stanley Kowalski—survivor of the Stone Age!"(Williams, *A Streetcar Named Desire* 72)[2]

--------Blanche, IV—72

"The first time I laid eyes on him I thought to myself, that man is my executioner! That man will destroy me…

--------Blanche, VI—93

"But Sister Blanche is no lily! Ha-ha! Some lily she is!"

--------Stanley, VII—99

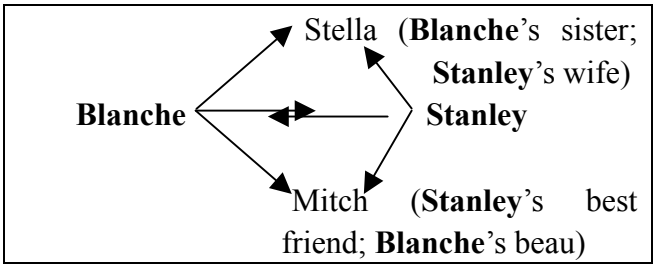
"We've had this date with each other from the beginning!"

--------Stanley, X—130

A Streetcar Named Desire is a play teeming with conflicts, subtle or obvious, among the characters. One of the main reasons the play holds such a strong appeal is that there are many less obvious yet keenly palpable forces at work, different from one another to the point of being incompatible, yet so entangling that the audience simply find themselves "there" in that small, two-roomed flat, floating fascinated in the ebb and flow of the play. At the same time it is amidst the coming together and then pushing away among the forces that the characters, Blanche, Stanley, Stella, and Mitch are separated from one another.

The center and source of the swirling conflicts is Blanche Dubois. The play is built on the whole gamut of her experience in New Orleans, beginning with her arrival, highlighting her stay in her sister's house and ending with her departure. Her strife with Stanley, her sisterly relationship with Stella and her short-lived romance with Mitch constitute the mainmast of the play. Part I will scrutinize these three duets, which reflect Blanche's many aspects from different perspectives.

Amidst the multi-faceted conflicts the antagonism between the two polar opposites, Blanche and Stanley, comes to the fore. Its centrality in *Streetcar* can be seen in the following chart:



[2] Roman numerals are used in this thesis to designate the scene sequence in *Streetcar*, i.e. I=Scene One, II=Scene Two…XI=Scene Eleven.

The Stanley-Blanche antagonism is the principal conflict in *Streetcar*. The clashes between Blanche and Stanley are inevitable. First of all they come from different backgrounds. Blanche's home is "…a great big place with white columns" (I—17), while Stanley lives in a small two-room flat. Blanche's refinement and propriety, which she makes a point of showing off, reflect her cultured upbringing and Stanley strikes one as uncouth and sometimes "bestial". In a more important fashion, they represent two different views of life. Blanche is a relic of the decayed southern plantation and more than that she clings to her aristocratic heritage so tightly that she cannot come to terms with social changes. To compound her situation, she has a heavy burden on her mind—her sordid and traumatic past marked with her sexual promiscuity in Laurel, which follows her everywhere like a shadow. Because of this she takes an evasive and escapist attitude toward life and finds shelter in a world of illusions, while maintaining the façade of a prim, proper and prudent woman. Compared with this "white moth"(I—15), which suggests frailty, Stanley is described as a "richly feathered male bird" of power and pride "among hens (29)", overflowing with vitality. His may be a common and rough life, but vivid and real, too. He embraces heartily—and lustfully—the pleasures of life and enjoys everything "that is his, that bears his emblem of the gaudy seed-bearer (29)." These two utterly different views of life, when placed together, are bound to collide with each other with immense force. *Streetcar*, in a sense, is about the how and when of this collision, with a few other conflicts running parallel to it. But is it an even contest, the moth vs. the cock? The answer goes without saying.

The chart below demonstrates the puissant strife between Blanche and Stanley:

	Blanche	Stanley
Scene 1	◆ "Daintily dressed", incongruity of her appearance with Stanley's place; moth-like apparel and uncertain manner; ◆ Secretly drinks Stanley's liquor (infringing on his property, more to come)	◆ Throws meat at his wife, coarseness, strong physicality; "richly feathered male bird" ◆ Clumsy attempt at small talk, which inadvertently turns into wound-tearing questions for Blanche: "You were married once, weren't you?" "What happened?"
Scene 2	◆ No convincing reason given for the loss or the sale of Belle Reve ◆ With her blend of flirtation, nonsense, sincerity, and desperation, Blanche wants to disarm Stanley and convince	◆ Suspects foul play (swindling), giving no heed to Stella's plea to him to "be nice to her" ◆ Roots rudely through Blanche's trunk looking for legal papers for the sale of the estate ◆ Opens and begins to read the old

	him that no fraud has been perpetrated against anyone ◆ Horrified and in great pain	letters and love poems from her husband
Scene 3	◆ Denigrates her enemy, saying she has not noticed "the stamp of genius even on Stanley's forehead" ◆ Lures Mitch with her charm; turns on the radio and dances to the rhumba music ◆ Delighted by her handling of Mitch, impulsively turns on the radio again ◆ Outraged by Stanley's brutality, leads Stella to the neighbor Eunice's apartment; begins to see Stanley as an opponent in her life	◆ Losing at cards, pissed off by Blanche's locking Mitch in conversation; turns off the radio; "stops short at the sight of Blanche in the chair. She returns his look without flinching" ◆ Leaps up, rushes to the radio, and hurls it out the window; brutally strikes an angered Stella ◆ Sobered, wants Stella back; begins to see Blanche as a threat (here in his kingdom the intruder Blanche has lured both his wife and his best friend into her orbit, and has appropriated his radio for her kind of music)
Scene 4	◆ Scandalized by Stella and Stanley's connubial reunion so quickly after the brutality; Attempts to rescue her sister and begins a harangue of invective against Stanley: madman, ape-like, survivor of the Stone Age, brute	◆ Overhears Blanche's diatribe, knowing beyond a doubt that he is engaged in war with Blanche for Stella's heart and mind, among other things
Scene 5	◆ Shaken to the core by Stanley's mention of someone named Shaw[3] and the Hotel Flamingo; becomes desperate and hysterical	◆ Begins to investigate Blanche's sordid past and insinuates it to her face; the bugle is blown for a pitched battle
Scene 7 (Scene 6 is about Blanche and Mitch)	◆ Taking a bath while Stanley is carrying out his strategy to drive her out of his home; feels fearfully something is wrong	◆ Has found enough witnesses who can verify Blanche's reputation in Laurel; recounts it to a disbelieving Stella, in the hope of cutting the sisterly bond; has already told Mitch about it and bought a ticket back to Laurel for Blanche

[3] Shaw is Blanche's nemesis. He is one of Stanley's acquaintances who often goes to Laurel on business and knows of Blanche's reputation. Blanche knows about him too.

Scene 8	◆ Dismayed by Mitch's not coming to her birthday dinner ◆ Devastated by Stanley's birthday present; senses the disaster closing in on her; psychologically collapsing	◆ Picks up argument in Blanche's birthday dinner, "I am the king around here!" ◆ Bent on removing Blanche, gives the ticket to her as the birthday present, and feels justified
Scene10 (Scene 9 is about Blanche ditched by Mitch)	◆ Mentally turbulent; drinking and packing; fantasizes about being invited to a trip by an old beau of hers ◆ Refers to Stanley as swine, playing the aristocratic role of intelligence, refinement and beautiful spirit ◆ Imagines a threat from Stanley and smashes a bottle, facing him with the broken top; succumbs to his physicality	◆ Delighted because his baby is on the way (Stella is about to go into labor); plays along with Blanche's illusion ◆ Confronts Blanche with her lies, tearing down her make-believe world point by point ◆ Physical aggression aroused by Blanche; fights with her; at last rapes her
Scene11	◆ Totally deranged, about to be sent to the institution; jostled into the terror of reality by Stanley	◆ Devoid of any kindness or pity or consideration for her crumpled nerves; terrifies her even in her derangement

We can see that the Blanche-Stanley incompatibility and antagonism, a bud in the beginning, grows as the play progresses, with a full, climactic flowering of force in the rape scene, continues to be manifest with no less compelling power as the curtain falls.

Impressed with the inevitability and forcefulness of clashes between the Blanche-Stanley duo, one can't help wondering what underlies the theatrical conflict, what it suggests, and in what light should we the audience understand it. The possibility of interpretation can—and should—go beneath the surface level of obvious conflicts, down into the deep stratum that is rich in sociological and psychological significance. The evident Blanche-Stanley conflict in the play goes as: Blanche as a belle of the decayed Southern aristocracy enters the life in her sister's house and comes to be regarded as an intruder by her common brother-in-law Stanley, who then manages to drive her out of his territory. There is, however, more to the polar opposites than this. We find, upon close inspection, that beneath the obvious opposition there are several underlying—and underpinning—dichotomies operating throughout the play.

One of them is Fantasy vs. Reality. Blanche clearly represents the former. As she admits to Mitch, she wants to misrepresent things, and wants things

misrepresented to her. “I don’t want realism. I want magic!” “I don’t tell the truth. I tell what ought to be the truth.” (IX—117) Only in a world of illusion can she live for how things ought to be, not how they are.

Then what is truth or realism for her? It is, for one thing, the haunting reality of what she has lost: her love, her purpose in life, her dignity, and the genteel society of her ancestors. The guilt she feels for having caused her husband’s death, and for her later sexual indiscretions, as well as the woe of witnessing older family members dying one by one and then for the loss of the family estate, the Belle Reve: these are simply too much for the fragile Blanche to bear.

Consequently she chooses to avoid the tormenting reality and seek refuge in illusion. With lies and bluffs she constructs for herself a painless make-believe world, which she tries hard to maintain. But, being a hypersensitive creature, she is dragged back into the cruel real world at the slightest cue (often deliberately by her enemy) and is forced to re-experience the guilt and woe and suffer all the more because of this. She tells lies and half-truths about her past, which, apart from being self-interested moves (to find lodging in New Orleans, or to make Mitch want her), serve to make her temporarily forget the cruel reality and feel better about herself. She tries to deceive others and herself about her old beau Shep Huntleigh who will come to her rescue—She seems to believe her lie so much that it becomes her truth. To Blanche, these personal falsifications are harmless white lies that simply complement her and help with her self-confidence. At least she can feel and appear better than the present state of reality allows.

Going hand in hand with her lies is her façade of a prim, proper and prudent Southern belle. She makes a point of exhibiting her refinement and charm before her host and his friends, especially Mitch. In doing this she is fantasizing a real decent cultured lady in herself, not at all a vulgar, promiscuous nymphomaniac. Contrary to realism, her world that is spun with fantasy and delusion gives her the life she dreams of living: a clean past, decency, ladyship, dignity and charm. Her world is that of illusions, which, according to Bigsby, have made Blanche a convincing actor in her own drama, and have charged the anarchy of her life with shape and purpose (19). But this fantasy world cannot be maintained all the time, nor for long. At times the aforementioned sensitivity of hers brings her back to the pain. Naturally she has to be constantly lying and fantasizing.

No less noteworthy is Blanche’s resorting to alcohol and baths. She swills down Stanley’s liquor and tells herself to get hold of herself, only to lie the more glibly. And the more she drinks, the more delusional she becomes. Alcohol numbs her agony and also fosters her fantasy. It is perhaps the drunken oblivion for which she aims. In that state she would be completely disengaged from reality and feel no

pain. To Blanche, to feel no pain is bliss. She frequents the bathroom, for "my nerves are in knots" (III—48). The bathroom is her shelter from reality. A long hot bath is refreshing and renewing, as if capable of cleansing the slime off her past. And she will emerge from the bathroom, "airily", fantasizing about feeling "…like a brand new human being!"(II—37) The fact is, ultimately she will walk out of the bathroom and risk being confronted with her past. But to Blanche, so long as she can sustain her illusion of a pastless life, if only for a short while, her bathroom ritual is still a precious solace.

With regard to Blanche's fantasy, there are yet a few details in the play that deserve our attention, such as her proclivity to pompous poetic rhetoric instead of pinpointing the concrete and physical, and her predilection for semi-darkness which enables her to work magic on her aged face until Mitch removes the lantern. Her sort of magic is to fantasize and make others believe that she is still a captivating southern belle, while in fact she is, in her own words, a lily "that's been picked a few days" (III—47).

Just as bubbles are burst by needles, so Blanche's fantasy is impaled by the no-nonsense realist Stanley. A man of reality, he is rough, straightforward, and expects people to "lay [their] cards on the table"(II—40). He doesn't go in for admiration or compliments or "this Hollywood glamour stuff"(II—39). While Blanche conducts her ruse of flattering/flirting, Stanley booms "Now let's cut the re-bop!"(40) He celebrates the present and enjoys everything that is his, that brings him real and concrete joy: bowling, poker, life with Stella. Rooted in reality, he has his point of view shaped accordingly. Through her rhetorical show of hysteria, Blanche still doesn't give a convincing answer as to how Belle Reve is lost, while Stanley sees the crux of the issue at one glance: "…let's have a gander at the bill of sale."(34) In contrast with Blanche' s ready verbalization, Stanley supplies the play with his coarse bluntness, much of which, when directed against Blanche, aims at blowing away her fantasized superiority and pretensions and tormenting her with cruel reality. Indifferent to how Blanche feels, Stanley ruffles Blanche's rich clothes in search of the legal papers—concrete evidence, instead of a wet-eyed exposé—for the sale of Belle Reve. When Blanche puts on the airs of a lady and dances gracefully to the rhumba from the radio, Stanley snatches the radio and hurls it out of the window, as if to remind Blanche that he is the king of this territory and she is but a "visiting-in-law"(I—23). While Blanche is having her make-believe purification in the bathroom, it's Stanley the realist who rejects it, "it's my kidneys I'm worried about!"(VII—102) It's this realist again who sets out to investigate Blanche's past and then confronts her with wound-splitting questions. Bent on shattering her fantasized superiority and pretensions, Stanley is cruel enough to rub salt into

Blanche's bleeding wound by handing her a ticket to Laurel, a place to which she can no longer go back, and later by tearing the paper lantern off the bulb, at which "she cries out as if the lantern was herself."(XI—140)

Stanley's strong cocky physicality, in contrast to Blanche's moth-like frailty, displays itself the most in the rape scene. He has hurled merciless reality upon Blanche so consistently and in such a forceful way that she's driven into insanity, the true unmistaken world of fantasy that is the only place she can go. That Blanche represents fantasy and Stanley reality and that the antagonism between the two is ever so sharp may be succinctly shown in the last scene as Blanche is going past the poker party. Stanley slaps the daydreaming Mitch on the shoulder and says "Hey, Mitch, come to!"(134) And his voice jostles the now deranged Blanche into sudden recognition of cruel reality. Her reaction changes from that of shock to that of perplexity and then to abrupt hysteria. The contrapuntal fantasy and reality speak volumes for the incompatibility of Blanche and Stanley, yet in a sense they may also reflect the goings-on in Blanche's mind. In the words of Mary A. Corrigan, "the conflict between Blanche and Stanley is an externalization of the conflict that goes on within Blanche between illusion and reality."(391) When Blanche's moment of thoughtless cruelty precipitated her husband's suicide, "the searchlight which had been turned on the world was turned off again and never for one moment since has there been any light that's stronger than this—kitchen—candle…" (VI—96)

With this light gone from her life—together with her other pillars of life crumbling: family disintegrating and Belle Reve slipping away, Blanche has lived without clarity, without a clear view of herself and reality. For a guilt-ridden Blanche, the boundary between illusion and reality has become blurred. She chooses make-believe, living for "what *ought* to be truth"(IX—117). It takes an obtrusive Stanley-reality to whisk her down from the fantasy world into the real one and then ultimately deliver her back into fantasy, never to return to reality.

The Blanche-Stanley antagonism can be interpreted as the aforesaid interaction between illusion and reality. It also reflects, if we put it into a wider social context, the substitution of a new society (the New South) for the old one (the Old South), suggested primarily by the different backgrounds—and later the fateful strife between one another—that Blanche and Stanley have. Blanche and Stella were the last aboard the sinking ship that is the old decadence of Southern aristocracy. Years of "epic fornications,"(II—43) as Blanche puts it, have swallowed up the material resources of the family. All that remain are the manners and pretensions that are like atrophied leaves on a dead tree, devoid of vitality. Yet Blanche clings to these leaves and imagines a world in which they are still verdant. Her display of her